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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 001014

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STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
OSD FOR KIMMITT
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SUBJECT: KARZAI SUPPORTS CONTINUED ERADICATION WITH
RESERVATIONS

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald Neumann for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: President Karzai convened a counter-narcotics cabinet meeting on March 27 where he discussed eradication efforts with key ministers and representatives of the international community. Prior to the cabinet meeting he told Ambassador that he would push for an additional 5000 hectares of eradication in Helmand. Karzai, however, expressed reservations about eradication's effectiveness during the meeting and pressed the participants to consider alternative approaches to combating narcotics, including subsidies for licit crops, increased interdiction, and amnesty for traffickers. At the same time he noted that an earlier experiment buying out the poppy crop--\$40 million in 2003--had been a disaster that was still posing problems.
END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) In a one-on-one meeting Ambassador pushed Karzai hard on the need to make one more strong push on eradication in Helmand. Karzai's question was simple, "how many districts will I lose to the Taliban if I eradicate 5000 more hectares in Helmand?" Ambassador pressed that for any area we select someone will have an objection. The only way to get progress without unacceptable risk is for Karzai to insist that Governor Wafa and Deputy Governor Pir Mohammad find the areas that can be eradicated. Karzai said he cannot do this on the telephone. He will push it hard when he sees the Governor on March 29 in Helmand.

¶3. (C) In the larger meeting Karzai reiterated that while he does not have full confidence in the program and feels that the security situation in the South exacerbates the risk, he has made a commitment to eradicate, and he will intensify efforts at eradication in Helmand. He said that the GOA does not have full control of the area, but he is committed to continued eradication there even if it does worsen security. However, he noted that this is a test year for extensive eradication in Helmand, and he would reconsider the tactic next year if the consequences were an untenable deterioration of the province's security.

¶4. (C) Karzai's discomfort with eradication was evident. He pressed the meeting participants for new approaches to combating the drug problem, including:

-- subsidies for licit crops - the Minister of Agriculture

said that a previous attempt working with the Ministry of Finance had failed;

-- increased interdiction - Amrullah Saleh, Chief of the National Directorate of Security (NDS), warned that current resource demands required to deal with security issues would prevent effective law enforcement and interdiction operations;

-- amnesty for drug traffickers in order to legalize their money and enterprises - Saleh was open to secret approaches to select individuals, but all participants recognized that this approach was replete with pitfalls and problems. The Ambassador reviewed the problems we have encountered in a similar program in Colombia. Karzai understood. However, the President ordered NDS and the National Security Council to conduct a study of such a program's viability.

15. (C) COMMENT: As always, the discussion of counter-narcotics became interwoven in a broader conversation of the need for development assistance. All of the participants--Afghan and internationals, alike--noted the necessity of improving the country's economic infrastructure: roads, irrigation canals, markets, etc. With time and a growing economy more and more Afghans will seek their fortunes in the licit economy. However, there are no short-cuts. The President, himself, was the one to note that previous silver bullets have not worked, pointing to the failed \$40 million UK-GOA effort to buy poppy crops in 2003 that is still causing troubles today. It was clear that the President is a reluctant proponent of eradication, and he was openly disturbed by UNODC's comment that Afghanistan would fall far short of the 40,000 - 50,000 hectares of eradication necessary to offer a deterrent, remarking that "we really are

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in trouble." He recognizes, though, that his ties to us and the international community necessitate immediate action, and eradication offers the best approach right now. END COMMENT
NEUMANN